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SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF EXISTING NETWORKS, INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND BODIES

Note by the secretariat

1. By its decision 23/COP.1, on the recommendation of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), the Conference of the Parties (COP) approved the proposal contained in document ICCD/COP(1)/CST/2/Add.1 submitted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on behalf of itself and a consortium of members, for the work on the survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies.

2. By the same decision, the COP adopted the terms of reference for the work and requested the head of the secretariat to enter into any necessary contractual arrangements on behalf of the COP for completion of the work within the framework of the terms of reference.

3. The COP also requested UNEP to include the participation of any other organization qualified and able to contribute to the work contemplated in the proposal, provided that such organization indicated its interest to UNEP no later than 15 December 1997.

4. The COP, by its decision 17/COP.2, noted the contractual arrangements entered into by the head of the secretariat with UNEP on behalf of the COP for the completion of the work on the survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies, and further noted the efforts made by UNEP in its work on that subject.

5. By the same decision, on the recommendation of the CST, the COP:

(a) Requested UNEP to continue to expedite this process in conformity with the mandate given to it by the COP at its first session, and to submit a report to the COP at its third session; and

(b) Further requested UNEP to submit a methodology for carrying out the second and third phases of the survey and evaluation for consideration by the CST at its third session in conformity with decision 23/COP.1, annex.

6. The report of UNEP on the survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies is contained in this document.

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Survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies relevant to implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Report of a global study prepared by a Consortium following 15 agencies:

United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**), lead agency; The Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands (**ACSAD**); Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (**BGU**); China National Committee for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (**CCICCD**); Desert Research Centre (**DRC**) Egypt; Regional Network of Research and Training Centres on Desertification Control in Asia and the Pacific (**DESCONAP**), Programme Office in Tehran; European Environment Agency (**EEA**); Food and Organization of the United Nations (**FAO**); International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, (**ICRISAT**) Sahelien Center (Desert Margins Programme DMP); International Soil Reference and Information Centre (**ISRIC**); Mediterranean Desertification and Land Use Geography Department King's College London (**MEDALUS**); Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel (**OSS**); German NGO-Working Group on Desertification **RIOD** c/o TBW; UNDP Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (**UNSO**); University of Arizona, Arid Lands Information Center (**ALIC**); World Meteorological Organization (**WMO**).

31 August 1999

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report is the synthesis and the final output of the preliminary first phase of a survey of networks, institutions, agencies and bodies relevant to the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. The survey has been undertaken by a consortium of 15 United Nations and non-United Nations agencies coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It was prepared in response to the request by the Conference of Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification[1]/ at its first meeting, and under a contract between the Convention secretariat and UNEP, as the principal contractor, and subsequent subcontracts with other consortium members.

This phase of the survey has taken roughly one year after completion of the contractual arrangements between UNEP and the other consortium members. The survey was subdivided into geographical and topical subsets and carried out by the different consortium members in accordance with their individual familiarity with the geographical areas or comparative technical and institutional advantages *vis-a-vis* the topics of the survey. For each region and topic a lead agency was nominated to coordinate the work, and for the whole survey exercise a steering group was formed.

The consortium first formed itself into a network and through intensive e-mail consultations produced its tools: methodology, criteria, questionnaire[2]/ (which contains the criteria in the form of questions), prepared lists of agencies, institutions, and organizations to be contacted, and a model for an interactive World Wide Web database management system.

Almost 5,000 contacts were made and 1,060 (as of 31 August 1999) responses received and entered in the database (and more are still coming in). Both the consortium members and the respondent organizations contributed substantially to the development of the database. While accessing and entering data in the database, they pointed out its deficiencies and helped the programmers at the University of Arizona to sort out the programmatic loops. The database has evolved as a highly interactive source of data and a potential forum for a dialogue between interested parties.

Ownership of the database will be by the Convention secretariat in Bonn. The consortium proposes that primary access to the database be provided from the Convention web site by means of a hot link and/or new domain name or alias address

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[1] Decision 23/COP.1 of the Conference of Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification at its first meeting, Rome, Italy, October 1997.

[2] Questionnaire (in annex II).

for the database web site that will more closely identify it with the Convention secretariat headquarters in Bonn. For the time being, however, the database is physically housed on a server in the University of Arizona, where the database programming, web site interface development, and database management are the responsibility of a team directed by the Arid Lands Information Center (ALIC).

The consortium, in accordance with its terms of reference, proposes an approach for a further phase of the survey, including the development and maintenance of the established database and detailed research on selected thematic area networks. It is a module approach, allowing various thematic network modules to be surveyed simultaneously with the database maintenance module, and one or multiple networks to be surveyed at the same time, depending on the availability of funds. The module approach further allows learning by doing: redefining of strategy and amendment of activities as work progresses. In its expert opinion, the consortium proposes that the second phase of the survey should be conducted in a region covering Africa and the Mediterranean basin. The latter is included as a natural geographical and cultural bridge between north Africa, western Asia and southern Europe.

2. BACKGROUND

At the request of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) for the Convention to Combat Desertification, and in accordance with decision 23/COP.1 of October 1997 by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its first meeting, a consortium3/ (annex I) of partners headed by UNEP was contracted to undertake the preliminary phase (phase 1) of a world-wide survey and evaluation of the relevant existing networks, institutions, agencies, and bodies which were willing to become part of a global network of networks to support the implementation of the Convention.

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[3] List of consortium partners:

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), lead agency
Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands (ACSAD);
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU);
China National Committee for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCICCD);
Desert Research Center (DRC) Egypt;
Regional Network of Research and Training Centres on Desertification Control in Asia and the Pacific (DESCONAP), Progamme Office in Tehran;
European Environment Agency (EEA);
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);
International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Sahelien Center, Desert Margins Programme (DMP);
International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC);
Mediterranean Desertification and Land Use, Geography Department, King's College London (MEDALUS);
Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel (OSS);
German NGO-Working Group on Desertification (RIOD / NFP);
UNDP Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO);
University of Arizona, Arid Lands Information Center (ALIC);
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

In accordance with the agreement between UNEP and the Convention secretariat, phase 1 of the survey project was to produce the following:

(a) Questionnaire for the identification of existing networks/units;

(b) Criteria for the evaluation of institutions, agencies and networks;

(c) Identification of principal existing networks, and definition of their roles in relation to specific articles in the Convention to Combat Desertification;

(d) Linkages among the principal networks, including identification and description of gaps and possible overlaps;

(e) Development of a database management system for the information gained from the survey and for providing access to it;

(f) Development of a methodology for conducting the pilot in-depth surveys and evaluation of potential units in different regions and subregions and their replication in other regions;

(g) Development of a cost-effective methodology for the regular updating of the network inventory;

(h) Selection and prioritization of the region and subregion to be surveyed in phase 2;

(i) Formulation of a final plan of action for phases 2 and 3;

(j) Preparation of a final project report and its submission to CST.

As already reported to CST at the second meeting of the Conference of Parties in Dakar, Senegal, UNEP, as the coordinator of the consortium, subcontracted other members of the consortium, in line with their proposed contributions and specific expertise and according to their comparative advantages, knowledge and information. A steering committee composed of key consortium members was formed to advise on project implementation; and in each geographical or topical area a working group was formed and a lead agency was nominated to coordinate its inputs and liaise with neighbouring and/or related areas.

After the formalization of all subcontracts between UNEP and the individual consortium members, the consortium started a global survey in September 1998.

3. PHASE 1

In accordance with decisions 23/COP.1 and 17/COP.2, the consortium of partners (annex I), headed by UNEP, carried out the following activities:

(a) Development of criteria for the preliminary evaluation of all units contacted in terms of their general potential for working on implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification, based on such factors as: committed staff, availability of resources, depth of experience in desertification work, level of activity, etc.;

(b) Formulation of a questionnaire for the identification of relevant existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies willing to become units of the network for phase 1. A cover letter providing introductory statements to the questionnaire stated the ultimate goal of creating a global network of institutions or units to help implement the Convention, and elaborated the purpose and general benefits of strengthening networks at various levels to achieve this end;

(c) Identification of the networks, institutions, agencies and bodies to be contacted in the regions which were or had been designated as their areas of coverage;

(d) Distribution of the questionnaires to these networks, institutions, agencies and bodies via e-mail, wherever possible, and by fax or mail if necessary;

(e) Compilation of the information collected from the questionnaire survey into a database management system.

A short description of the various activities in phase 1 is given in the following paragraphs.

3.1. Database management system

The database management system consists of three components:

(a) The database itself, together with data entered into the database;

(b) A web site interface to the database;

(c) Interactive scripts, transparent to end-users, that enable the interactivity of the database (e.g., registration, log-in, data entry and database searching).

The development of the database management system was carried out by a team of three specialists from the University of Arizona. Two of these are information specialists, responsible for:

(a) Design of the questionnaire (working jointly);

(b) Design of the web site interface to the database and acting as liaison between the consortium members and the database programmer (first information specialist);

(c) Design of the cover letters for the questionnaire, and carrying out the survey for the north American region (second information officer).

The third specialist is a database programmer, who is responsible for:

(a) Creating the web site database structure (using Oracle software); and

(b) Programming of custom-made scripts that provide the interactivity of the database.

In addition, feedback from consortium members for the design of the questionnaire was essential throughout the entire process.

3.2. Web site interface

The web site interface to the database consists of:

(a) Home (introductory) page;

(b) For the world at large:

(i) Search page,providing instructions on how to query the database;

(ii) Background information pages on desertification, the Convention to Combat Desertification, and this project;

(iii) Links to copies of articles 16-19 of the Convention;

(iv) Page for suggesting further institutions for participation in the survey;

(c) For participating institutions:

(i) Registration page and log-in pages allowing secure access to online data entry forms;

(ii) Online data entry forms, introduced by text explaining their use.

The web site interface to this database allows password-secured, direct data entry, updating and editing of records by responding institutions or by consortium members on behalf of responding institutions. In addition, the web site interface

allows searching of all records in the database, by any interested persons. Furthermore, the web site interface currently provides access to basic background information on desertification, the Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Convention's information network project. The information network project web site is currently accessible at the following URL: <http://ag.arizona.edu/OALS/CSTCCD>.

3.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see annex II), which was translated into the six United Nations languages, Portuguese and Mongolian, consists of two components:

(a) Cover letter introducing the survey, explaining its purpose, and requesting participation of the contacted institution; and

(b) Questionnaire itself, designed to gather the following information in support of articles 16-19 of the Convention to Combat Desertification:

(i) Background information, e.g., institution address, contact person, working language(s), nature of institution, geographic scope and general nature of topics and/or activities conducted in relation to desertification and drought, such as information collection and exchange, research, technology transfer, benchmarks and indicators, capacity-building, policy formulation and local-level activities and traditional knowledge;

(ii) Infrastructure information, e.g., major departments or divisions (if any), funding sources, number and gender breakdown of staff, and type and location of field stations, subsidiary bodies, etc. (if any);

(iii) Capacity to help implement the Convention to Combat Desertification, e.g., participation in the national action plan (NAP) process and preparation of NAPs, participation in national coordinating bodies, membership in formal networks, and specific activities conducted in relation to desertification/drought.

3.4. Responses to questionnaires

A summary of the number of questionnaires and responses received from different regions is provided in annex III.

3.5. Consortium meeting

At a meeting of the consortium held at the Convention secretariat in Bonn from 6 to 8 July 1999, the consortium examined the following issues relevant to the survey.

3.5.1. Identification of linkages among relevant networks, institutions, agencies and bodies and gaps and overlaps between them

All the members of the consortium represented at the meeting presented their reports on the responses to the questionnaires that were sent out by them.

The rate of responses received to date from different regions is encouraging. As of 31 August 1999, the consortium had identified almost 5,000 institutions, agencies and bodies, which, in its expert opinion, had the potential to become part of the network of bodies for the implementation of the Convention. A full list of agencies (in English) on CD-ROM and diskettes has been submitted to and is available at the Convention secretariat. 1060 responses have been received. To achieve a greater rate of return of responses, the consortium partners are contacting the different networks, institutions, agencies and bodies in their area of responsibility a second time. As this exercise is currently under way, the consortium recommended that the task of identification of relevant networks, institutions, agencies and bodies and the linkages between them should be taken up when a critical mass of responses has been achieved.

Furthermore, the consortium recommends that, while identifying linkages among the networks, institutions, agencies and bodies and gaps and overlaps between them, it is important to keep in mind the capacity of the above groups to contribute to one or more of the following primary activities of relevance to the Convention to Combat Desertification:

(a) Information collection, analysis and exchange (article 16);

(b) Research and development (article 17);

(c) Transfer, acquisition, adaptation and development of technology (article 18);

(d) Capacity-building, education and public awareness (article 19).

The consortium recognized that there could be a number of gaps and overlaps relating to regions and countries and language. The lack of clearly identified coordination bodies within some of the regional annexes (2,3 and 4) and between annexes (for example, the Mediterranean) was identified as a major gap.

The consortium also recognized that delay in the return of responses was due in part to a lack of internet connectivity and access to information technology for many of the respondents to the questionnaire. Language issues were also a factor in influencing the delays in the returns, as the translation into the target

language and back into English took time. Furthermore, the translation of certain concepts, e.g., "network", and keywords affected the quality of certain responses.

3.5.2. Evaluation criteria

The consortium considered the issue of criteria for evaluating networks, institutions, agencies and bodies in terms of their capacity and effectiveness in contributing to the implementation of the Convention and proposed the following criteria:

(a) Presence of an appropriate structure that allows the effective implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification;

(b) Ability to serve the diverse needs of its members at all levels;

(c) Presence of a structure that facilitates a two-way flow of information between the providers and the users of information;

(d) Shared vision to interact and benefit from the experiences and background of other members who are interested in becoming part of the network;

(e) Openness and transparency in the sharing of information, its analysis and exchange at different levels;

(f) Ability to deal with different goals in the implementation of the Convention at different scales;

(g) Clear identification with the network processes including conflict resolution, accountability mechanisms, decision-making procedures and lobbying;

(h) Shared commitment to carry out the activities as agreed upon by the members in the network;

(i) Commitment to share knowledge and experiences that contribute to increasing the capacity of members of the network;

(j) Willingness to transfer, acquire, adapt, and develop appropriate technologies in the implementation of the Convention.

3.6. Follow up to phase 1

As a database quality control measure and in order to promote collaboration and information exchange, the consortium members plan to send a compilation of the responses received from different countries to national focal points with a view to ensuring the completeness and accuracy of the database contents of phase 1. This is to identify unexplained gaps in responses and to eliminate duplicate entries received from institutions already identified and surveyed within that country during phase 1. It is also to identlfy currently incomplete database entries from within that country, with specific reference to questions whose answers are essential to database function as a tool for evaluating and identifying potential members of the network envisaged in decisions 23/COP.1 and 17/COP.2.

4. PROPOSED WORK IN PHASE 2

Through the execution of phase 1, the consortium was able to extract valuable lessons for the design of the proposed phase 2. In order that the results of the survey are put to optimum use to meet the requirements in article 25, a vision of possible network benefits, operation modalities, participants' roles and function and financial implications must be shared and discussed among its potential members. Without such a vision as a starting point, it is not possible to design a methodology and action plan. Through dialogue with survey respondents and exchange among the consortium members, one such possible vision crystallized. This vision was based on several observations:

(a) That survey respondents were interested in becoming active network participants, if the possibility of obtaining benefits was real;

(b) That, notwithstanding the disparity in levels of access to internet technology among survey respondents, the World Wide Web ultimately offers the best opportunities for cost effective network building;

(c) That the management of the tremendous amount of information to which the network would provide access can be extremely unwieldy unless a decentralized approach is adopted; and

(d) That the value of the phase 1 database can be capitalized if a proactive approach to network development is chosen and supported by the Conference of the Parties.

4.1. Assumptions for phase 2

The above observations led the consortium to certain assumptions for network development in phase 2. The first assumption is that the survey respondents have incentives for participating in the network development. These incentives could include access to information on:

(a) Where to locate technical support for specific issues of concern to the network member;

(b) Who is funding programmes in dryland development, and the conditions under which funding is made available;

(c) Who is performing research similar to one's own and how they can be contacted. To this end, members indicate their interest to share information on best practices, news and events related to a particular theme, etc.

A second assumption is that, given the need for a decentralized approach, the database should function as a "switchboard" tool for network development. This implies that the database would not house all the relevant information of each

institution, but rather would include links to other network members' data sources through a metadata function.

4.2. Methodology

The methodology for the second phase would have two main elements. The first element is ensuring a high quality standard for the database and to improve its content. The second element is the adoption of a proactive approach to building networks as a survey follow-up (see also annex IV).

4.2.1. Quality standards and improved content

Quality standards are necessary for ensuring credibility of the database and its potential as a tool for network building. The consortium proposes that each respondent be given feedback, using interpersonal contacts (e-mail, fax, phone), to initial respondents in terms of filling in the gaps and further validating responses.

The main activity is the design and distribution of two in-depth questionnaires. One will be targeted specifically at non-governmental and community based organizations and the other will be targeted at all other surveyed organizations within the selected phase 2 priority region. Such organizations may include research organizations, private sector organizations, donor agencies and local authorities.

These in-depth surveys will concentrate on gathering detailed information regarding the organization's desertification-related activities, such as:

(a) Field research;

(b) Laboratory research;

(c) Technical training and other educational activities;

(d) Awareness raising;

(e) Public outreach; and

(f) Production of publications in print or other media (including electronic).

Efforts would be made actively to involve national focal points or other national contact points, especially in affected countries were the response rate to the questionnaires has been low.

4.2.2. Proactive approach to network development

A second component of the methodology is the proactive approach to network development. To this effect, it is recommended that the Parties should:

(a) Encourage network participants to provide information about themselves, ideally on their own web sites. The information should include a list of products and services that the respondent offers;

(b) Provide specific examples to respondents of how the database might be used to develop networks;

(c) Encourage donor partners to enhance the capacity of national focal points to play an effective role in the development of the networks. Capacity is required to develop and manage individual web sites and work with partners to develop thematic networks.

Through the implementation of these measures, viable networks will be created by the end of phase 2 that will allow users effectively to participate with other actors in the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

4.3. Survey of traditional knowledge

As requested by the Conference of the Parties at its second meeting, the consortium discussed the issue of survey of traditional knowledge and identified the following criteria for evaluating networks institutions, agencies and bodies in terms of their capacity and effectiveness to contribute to this issue:

(a) Willingness to make and share inventories of traditional technology, knowledge, know-how and practices;

(b) Provision of support to the improvement and dissemination of traditional technology, knowledge, know-how and practices.

Furthermore, the consortium made the following recommendations:

(a) Using current responses, the University of Arizona should compile statistics on questions 1.7 or 1.8 and separately report through UNEP to the Conference of the Parties;

(b) In the in-depth survey phase, specific information on traditional knowledge should be highlighted. The survey should determine whether the respondents have information on traditional knowledge available, its nature, and the respondent's main partners;

(c) UNEP should be linked to the current ad hoc committee on traditional knowledge in order to assess the efforts of the committee and to complement the above information with its findings;

(d) In addition, the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge for Agriculture and Rural Development (CIKARD) should be contacted for the next phase of the traditional knowledge survey.

4.4. Suggestions for the selection of priority regions and subregions

The consortium discussed different possibilities for selecting priority regions and subregions for pursuing the survey in a more detailed manner in phase 2. In order to minimize costs in executing the survey, it is necessary to focus not only on subregions, but also on specific themes or issues that have the potential to provide a good focus for network development.

On a geographical basis, it would be logical to select Africa, given the priority for the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification. The consortium feels, however, that other regions should not be neglected. Therefore, as one alternative, it could be proposed that a subregion in Africa is chosen based on progress in NAP implementation, and that one issue-based existing programme network is selected. As another alternative, the consortium suggests to CST that a module approach be adopted and the in-depth survey carried out in a region covering Africa plus the Mediterranean subregion (as an "interface" region, stretching from north Africa to southern Europe and western Asia).

Modules of different thematic types of networks or for different subregions could be surveyed in parallel or in succession. In-depth surveys of these modules should not be carried out only in a form of a questionnaire approach but, as indicated above, should in addition involve personal contacts and research of the identified networks, institutions and organizations. A tentative proposal for a draft strategy, or modus operandi, for the implementation of phase 2 is contained in annex IV. A more detailed and costed proposal could be prepared on specified request from the Conference of the Parties (i.e., indicating what theme or information is of priority to the Parties) and in consultation with an appropriate consortium to be formed. It would include a cost-effective methodology for maintaining and updating of the database and the networks inventory and a draft approach methodology for conducting the in-depth surveys of thematic networks in Africa and Mediterranean region.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It would be useful to organize a network for each of the four regional annexes in the Convention. A joint meeting of the four regional networks could be organized once every two-four years to learn from mutual experiences and plan joint activities.

2. While recognizing that access to the internet is rapidly increasing among the Parties to the Convention, the Conference of the Parties may wish to encourage enhanced internet connectivity among the Parties to facilitate easier communication.

3. Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification should strengthen the role of national focal points.

4. The Convention secretariat should be encouraged to increase the awareness of the Parties to the Convention of this survey and of its expected benefits to the Parties.

5. To address the issue of lack of time for follow-up action (as observed during phase I of the current survey), it is recommended that, for phase 2, it would be useful to include in the reporting mechanism an interim report and a final report to be submitted to successive meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

6. The matter of resources for language-related issues should be addressed.

7. At its third meeting, the Conference of the Parties should be encouraged to identify coordination bodies for regional annexes where such bodies do not exist at present.

Annex I

LIST OF CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

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Contact: Dr. M.V.K. Sivakumar

Annex II

QUESTIONNAIRE

Subject: UA/ISRIC Master Cover Letter

9 February 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

1. At the request of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), a consortium of partners headed by the United Nations Environment Programme (see list below) is undertaking a world-wide survey and evaluation of the relevant existing networks, institutions, agencies, and bodies who are willing to become part of a global network of networks to support the implementation of the Convention. Institutions participating in the proposed network will benefit by heightened visibility in the international arena and by increased access to expertise and important resources to facilitate their work on desertification issues. The network also will provide new opportunities for exchanging information and for fostering constructive dialog on common issues.

2. In this phase of the project, answers from the attached questionnaire will be compiled into a database, which will be made available for searching through the World Wide Web and other means to all interested parties. In a further phase of this project, database entries will be analyzed and a methodology developed for in-depth evaluation of selected institutions at regional and subregional levels for the purposes of establishing the formal network. The results of this project are expected to contribute both to the implementation of the UNCCD, and to the general fields of biodiversity, climate change and water, given the cross-cutting nature of sustainable dryland management. In addition, the database will help organizations locate others who are working on similar topics. We hope you will help us in this endeavour by filling out the enclosed questionnaire.

3. To facilitate your reply, the following definition of desertification, as stated in Article 1 of the UNCCD, will be used to identify appropriate organisations for inclusion in the database. "Desertification means land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.
Combating desertification includes activities which are part of the integrated development of land in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas for sustainable development which are aimed at: (i) prevention and/or reduction of land degradation; (ii) rehabilitation of partly degraded land; and (iii) reclamation of desertified land" (ref. UNCCD web site: http://www.unccd.de/).

4. While the above definition emphasises the physical aspects of land degradation, the principles behind the development of the UNCCD focus on the need to promote sustainable development at the community level. This necessarily entails integrating programmes which address health, poverty, education and human rights with programmes which seek to (i) prevent and/or reduce land degradation; (ii) rehabilitate partly degraded land; and (iii) reclaim desertified land. Therefore if your organisation works in any of the above fields (health, poverty, education, human rights or natural resource management) we would like your organisation to be included in the UNCCD/UNEP database.

5. Once you have reviewed the attached copy of the questionnaire, please enter your responses via the Web forms at: http://ag.arizona.edu/OALS/CSTCCD. This is the address for the UNCCD Information Network Project Home Page. >From the home page, you can access the Data Entry Login page by entering the "top-level" database password, "cstccd" (entered without quotation marks). The first time you reach the Login page, you will be asked to fill out a registration form and to choose your own private password. This dual-password system is to ensure that, while anyone can search the database and read your institution's entry, nobody but you will be able to enter, update, or alter data pertaining to your institution.

6. If your institution does not have Web access, please use one of these other options to return your questionnaire: If using email, please return to: Katherine Waser at kwaser@ag.arizona.edu.
If you have no Internet access, please either fax or mail your response as follows:

If you are located in North or South America, Australia, or the Pacific Rim, please send your response to:

Arid Lands Information Center
Attn: Waser/Hutchinson
University of Arizona
1955 E. Sixth Street
Tucson, Arizona 85719-5224
USA
Fax: 1 (520) 621-3816

If you are located in Europe, Africa, or Asia, please send your response to:

International Soil Reference and Information Centre
Attn: Spaargaren
P.O. Box 353
6700 AJ Wageningen
The Netherlands
Fax: +31 (0)317 47 17 00

7. If you need further information or explanation on the project as a whole, please contact the project Working Group Leader who signed this letter.

Questionnaires should be returned no later than 30 April 1999. We appreciate your willingness to help with this endeavour and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

[Working Group Leader signatures as appropriate]

LIST OF CONSORTIUM PARTNERS
United Nations Environment Programme, lead institution
Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands
Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development
Comite Permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Secheresse dans la Sahel (CILSS)
European Environment Agency
German NGO-Working Group on Desertification (RIOD/NFP)
Instituto Argentino de Investigaciones de las Zonas Aridas (IADIZA)
Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Sahelien Center
International Soil Reference and Information Centre
Mediterranean Desertification and Land Use (MEDALUS), King's College London
Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel
Regional Network of Research and Training Centres on Desertification
Controls in Asia and the Pacific, Tehran Programme Office
United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO)
United Nations World Meteorological Organisation
University of Arizona, Office of Arid Lands Studies, Information Center

UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION -- INFORMATION NETWORK PROJECT

-----QUESTIONNAIRE-----

Part I: INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Exact name of institution:

1.2. Year established:

1.3. Address:
1.3.1. Postal address:

1.3.2. Telephone (with country & area code):

1.3.3. Fax (with country & area code):

1.3.4. Email:

1.3.5. Web site:

1.4. Contact person:
1.4.1. Name:

1.4.2. Title:

1.4.3. Contact address information (if different from the institution'
1.4.3.1. Postal address:

1.4.3.2. Telephone (with country & area code):

1.4.3.3. Fax (with country & area code):

1.4.3.4. Email:

1.5. Geographic Scope/Nature of Institution (please check all that apply):
____International
____Regional
____Subregional
____National
____Local
____Government/public administration

____Civil society (NGOs, unions, etc.)
____Private sector
____Academic
____Other
If other, please specify:

1.6. Working Language(s) (please check all that apply):
____English
____French
____Spanish
____Arabic
____Chinese
____Russian
____Other
If other, please specify:

1.7. What principal activities are part of your institution's mission, under the general umbrella of desertification/drought mitigation? (please check all that apply):
____Advocacy/networking/lobbying
____Fundraising
____Policy development/reform
____Technology transfer
____Community Development
____Implementation of field projects
____Extension/Community education
____Instruction/Training
____Capacity building
____Research: laboratory
____Research: fieldwork
____Other
If other, please specify:

1.8. What principal topical areas are part of your institution's mission, under the general umbrella of desertification/drought mitigation? (Please check all that apply)
____Local economic development
____Human dimensions of desertification
____Food security/relief delivery
____Migration/conflict management
____Poverty eradication

____Human rights
____Demography/population
____Appropriate technology
____Public/environmental health
____Drought Early Warning
____Gender issues/Women's issues
____Education/literacy
____Remote sensing/cartography/information systems
____Renewable energy
____Climate change
____Water resources management
____Rangeland management
____Natural resources management
____Wildlife management
____Environmental/Natural resources monitoring
____Ecology/botany/zoology of arid regions
____Indigenous knowledge
____Soil conservation
____Other
If other, please specify:

Part II: INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

2.1. Please list your insitution's four major divisions or departments (for example, "Energy Division," "Remote Sensing Department," "Division of Public Health," etc.):

2.1.1

2.1.2

2.1.3

2.1.4

2.2 Number of administrative staff with decision-making responsibility:
____Male
____Female

2.3. Number of technical/research staff:
____Male
____Female

2.4. Number of support staff:
____Male
____Female

2.5. Names of major funding sources within last four years (list top four):

2.5.1. Top funding source:

2.5.2. Second most important:

2.5.3. Third most important:

2.5.4. Fourth most important:

2.6. Approximate yearly funding level:

2.7. Additional facilities and addresses (subcenters, regional offices, experimental stations, field stations). (Please list as many as needed. Use additional sheets of paper as necessary):

Part III: CAPACITY TO WORK IN IMPLEMENTING THE CCD

3.1. Is your institution participating in developing a UNCCD National Action Programme (NAP)?

____Yes
____No

If yes, briefly describe your involvement and country or countries in which you are working:

3.2. Is your institution a member of the National Coordinating Body/Steering Committee?

____Yes
____No

If yes, briefly describe your involvement and country or countries in which you are working:

3.3. Please give the complete name(s), acronym(s), and a contact address for any formal network(s) your institution participates in as part of your desertification/drought mitigation activities: (For example, RIOD, OSS, IALC, etc.). (Please list as many as needed. Use additional sheets of paper, if necessary.)

3.4. Please give a brief overview of other specific desertification-related activities undertaken by your institution in the areas of:
--Information Collection, Analysis and Exchange
--Research and Development
--Transfer, Acquisition, Adaptation and Development of Technology
--Capacity Building, Training, Public Awareness
as specified in Articles 16-19 of the CCD. Please list as many activities as necessary, using additional sheets of paper for additional answers:

3.4.1 Desertification-related Activity 1:

3.4.1.1. Section(s) of CCD to which this activity relates (please check all that apply):

____Information Collection, Analysis and Exchange (Article 16)
____Research and Development (Article 17)
____Transfer, Acquisition, Adaptation and Development of Technology (Article 18)
____Capacity Building, Training, Public Awareness (Article 19)

3.4.1.2. Geographic scope of activity 1:

____International
____Regional
____Subregional
____National
____Local

3.4.1.3. Status of activity 1:

____Ongoing
____Periodic
____Completed

Annex III

SUMMARY REPORT ON QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS

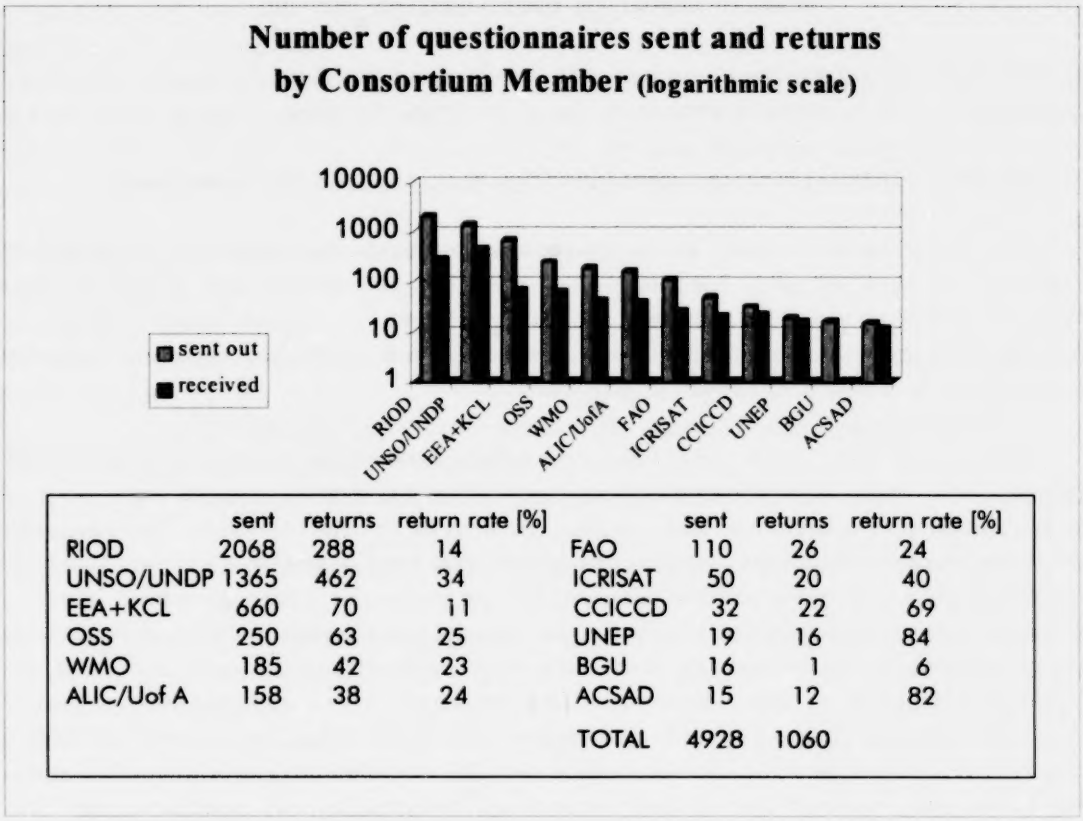
Compiled from the individual reports of consortium members submitted to UNEP for discussion at the synthesis workshop, held in Bonn, Germany, from 6 to 8 June 1999

I. General information on questionnaire distribution and responses

(1) The division of labour among consortium members was designed to ensure that the survey covered as many institutions, agencies and bodies and at all different levels of activity as possible and at low cost. By 31 August 1999, almost 5,000 agencies, bodies and networks had been contacted and 1,060 had replied, indicating a questionnaire return rate of 22 per cent.

(2) About 40 per cent of the contacts were made with non-governmental organizations. Many of the contacted non-governmental organizations have very basic communication infrastructure and, as yet, no access to the internet. The responsible consortium member, RIOD/NFP, contacted 2,068 partners globally, either directly or through various non-governmental organizations networks. This involved over 5,000 communications, including reminders. Other consortium members contacted considerably smaller numbers of agencies, as their areas of responsibility were confined either to specific regions or even countries (for example, the Jacob Blaustein Institute of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev surveyed only Israel and CCICCD only China). Similarly, the specialized organizations covered only one specific thematic area; thus, WMO covered the global network of meteorological stations and ICRISAT the CGIAR centres.

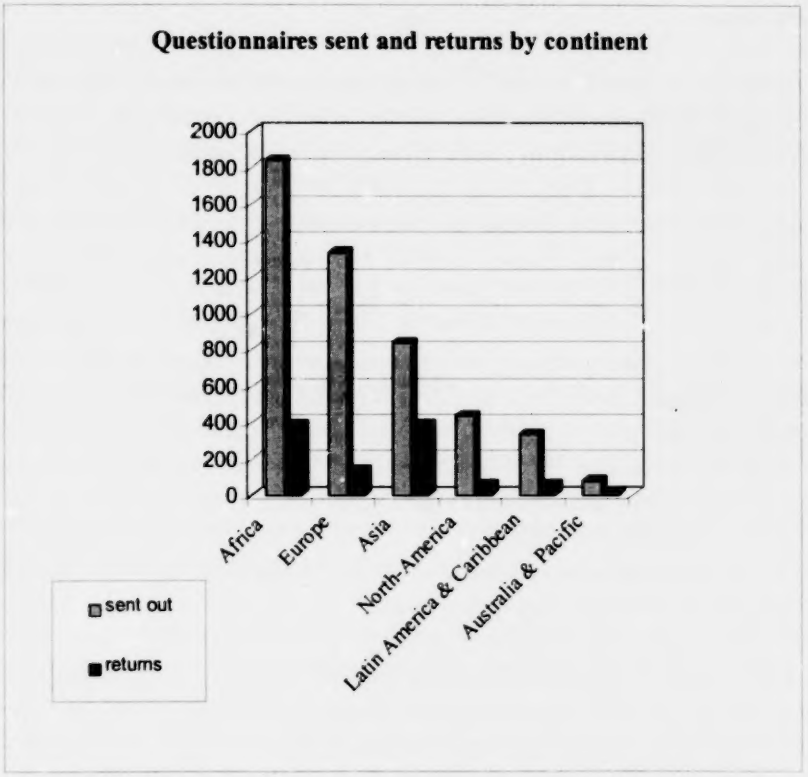
Figure 1



	sent	returns	return rate [%]		sent	returns	return rate [%]
RIOD	2068	288	14	FAO	110	26	24
UNSO/UNDP	1365	462	34	ICRISAT	50	20	40
EEA+KCL	660	70	11	CCICCD	32	22	69
OSS	250	63	25	UNEP	19	16	84
WMO	185	42	23	BGU	16	1	6
ALIC/Uof A	158	38	24	ACSAD	15	12	82
				TOTAL	4928	1060	

(3) It should also be noted that, at the regional level, the number of responses from Africa and Asia is proportionately higher than from other regions. The higher interest demonstrated by partners in the African continent may be evidence of better awareness of the Convention or stronger commitment to its implementation. Furthermore, many of the European institutions contacted that have activities outside Europe are predominantly active in Africa.

Figure 2



(4) The rate of return for each continent can be expressed in percentages. UNSO-UNDP has conducted an additional survey in eight countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. This exercise was based on local consultants and has yielded a response rate of 77 per cent in August 1999 alone. The great success of this subsurvey partially accounts for the high overall response rate for the Asian continent.

Table 1

Continent	**Relative return rate [%]**
Asia	46
Africa	21
Latin America & Caribbean	17
North America	13
Europe	10
Australia & Pacific	9

II. Specific issues in the questionnaire commented on by consortium members

A. Information gaps

(5) Comments on this issue were concerned primarily with three issues: Which gaps were identified within the questionnaire; which questions received little attention; and which questions were frequently left blank and for what reason.

(6) Many institutions did not complete question 1.3.5. (web site), even though their institution has a web site. This is common, especially for larger institutions.

(7) Question 1.5 (geographic scope) was often answered incompletely, and acronyms were often used for funding sources. A low response rate was reported on questions concerning gender ratios and funding levels. Some consortium members reported problems attributed to language difficulties and unfamiliarity with concepts like "desertification", "network" and "facility".

(8) Section III of the questionnaire, entitled "Capacity to work in implementing the CCD", seems to have caused most problems.

(9) Concerning question 3.1. (involvement in NAP process) it was noted that a high degree of "ownership" in the NAP process seems to exist with non-governmental organizations that declare themselves as "participating in the development of UNCCD NAPs". Their reported activities do not always refer to the NAP process itself, but rather to specific natural resource management activities that are likely to be covered by NAPs. Only in very few cases was precise information provided on involvement in the NAP process.

(10) In addition, the responses to question 3.3 (formal networks), often failed to provide the full addresses of networks. There seems to be no uniform understanding of the definition of a "network". In some regions of the world, the density of networks on desertification is low. In China, for example, the Chinese desertification information network (DIN) project, which is a part of UNDP CPR/96/111-project, only began operating as recently as 1997. DIN is the only network related to combating desertification and drought mitigation activities in China. It is currently gaining momentum.

(11) All consortium members noted problems with question 3.4.1 (desertification-related activity): many institutions filled in no activity at all or ignored question 3.4.1, but did, however, respond to its subquestions: 3.4.1.1 - 3.4.1.3. This suggests that the information and instructions given in the questionnaire were in some way insufficient.

(12) Descriptions of desertification-related activities were often missing or were merely copied from the question above. This may indicate that institutes and

agencies are eager to participate (for whatever reason), but have difficulties in relating their activities to desertification.

(13) The questionnaire makes reference to articles 16-19 of the Convention text, without making these articles available either on the same web page or as an attachment to the hard copy. This clearly indicates a need for awareness-raising about the Convention, even among institutions, agencies and organizations which the consortium had identified as having the necessary expertise and potential to implement the Convention.

B. Under-representation of certain subregions and countries in the survey areas and suggested reasons for their proportionately lower response rates

(14) Countries in every subregion differ in terms of their relative number of institutions dealing with desertification, political systems, social and economic structures, approaches to natural resources management, communication infrastructure, degree of centralization, interest in bottom-up approaches and cooperation with other countries. For that reason, the subregional data are greatly variable and are not easy to interpret.

(15) EEA and King's College reported a low response rate from Asia and Eastern Europe. As a consequence, UNSO/UNDP agreed to extend its survey area to include eight Central Asian countries.

(16) Within Africa, OSS reported the level of responses for north Africa and west Africa as relatively balanced, whereas ISRIC noted the under-representation of some Sahelien countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria and Senegal are not adequately represented as of June 1999. Owing to their lack of electronic or fax communications, most institutions in those countries were contacted by OSS through mail. This communication deficiency may have led to some losses of data, as certain institutions, known for their desertification control activities, did not respond, despite being sent reminders.

(17) UNSO/UNDP reported low returns and very variable responses from the Asia and Pacific region: there were low returns from the Pacific island countries, which, for the most part, do not fall within the Convention's definition of drylands, but often have natural resource management problems with land degradation. The return rate from countries in south and southeast Asia varied from high to low; thus, India had the highest response rate, while Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal and Thailand - all countries with high rates of poverty and with many local-level institutions - responded very poorly. It should also be noted that Australia, with very large dryland areas, had one of the lowest response rates.

(18) Latin America and the Caribbean countries are generally under-represented, with only Argentina and Peru showing a sizable number of institutions responding.

(19) In North America, more responses from institutions based in the United States have been expected, Canadian institutions have returned even less questionnaires.

(20) It is believed, however, that technical reasons and individual low prioritization of questionnaires, rather than political issues (e.g., non-ratification), underlie the non-response or low response rates from a number of countries.

III. Consortium members' feedback on the survey approach

A. Were the objectives met?

(21) The objectives for the first part of the survey1/, involving circulating the questionnaires, digitizing the information received into the database, and analysing the information received, have, by and large, been met. This may not be quite so evident in quantitative terms (in the European and Latin America and Caribbean region, as of June 1999, the percentage of answers was only just over 10 per cent). As the survey process is still under way, however, it is expected that the number of responses will increase substantially.

(22) In qualitative terms, however, the foundations for establishing a global network of networks and for developing a methodology for in-depth surveys have been laid.

(23) With regard to assessing categories of users of networks and their information needs, the data on networking structures need to be improved and more clearly focused. The existing database is not yet able reliably to meet the specific information needs of network users. At the same time, the existing data provide a good basis and entry point for a further in-depth assessment of regional and issue-based networks.

(24) With regard to the questions related to the development of criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of institutions, agencies and networks, the design of the phase 1 questionnaire provides some basic evaluation criteria focusing on the clustering of institutions and organizations. Very little specific information was

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1/ The following are the objectives of phase I of the survey:

1. To design and distribute master versions of the phase I questionnaire;
2. To design the database - the basic work has been done and its refinement is still in progress;
3. To compile the database and publish it on WWW site: the basic work has been done, but the exercise is still under way as new entries are being added;
4. To develop a cost-effective methodology for updating the database: work is currently in progress;
5. To develop the methodology for in-depth surveys - discussed at the Bonn workshop.

provided by the survey participants with regard to this objective, however. A thorough brainstorming session on this issue at the synthesis workshop in Bonn was instrumental to the designing of the draft strategy for the further development of the database (see also annex IV).

B. What, in the view of consortium members, are the main advantages of this survey approach?

(25) Members identified the following advantages of the survey approach:

(a) Direct information is obtained from the institutions interested in joining the cooperative activities on combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought;

(b) Cooperative activities on combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought are encouraged and new linkages are established with institutions dealing with the issues of land degradation, desertification combating, poverty alleviation, rural economics and environmental protection;

(c) Information is provided and exchanged. The multidisciplinary character of the institutions, and thus of the information collected, will be a great advantage when assessments of different types are required;

(d) The approach is cost-effective and time efficient;

(e) Many countries and institutions are covered;

(f) Future updating is both possible and easy;

(g) Standardization of information can be considered a methodological advantage;

(h) The survey is relatively easy to respond to for those who have good web or internet connections;

(i) The web site provides instant access to the database of survey results;

(j) The general strategy of considering a regional approach by assigning regional responsibilities among consortium members seems appropriate;

(k) The approach is conducive to a very rapid response and in a short time a lot of connections (names, addresses) can be established;

(l) Certain institutions that were contacted were very interested in the questionnaire and felt that it helped them gain insight into the potential role that they could play in implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

C. What are the main disadvantages of this survey approach?

(26) Consortium members identified the following as the main disadvantages of the approach:

(a) Lack of active participation from the national focal points, logistical difficulties, language barriers and time constraints made conduct of the survey in some regions very difficult, which resulted in a poor response from some countries;

(b) Some countries in some regions do not fall under the Convention definition of drylands and may have misunderstood the objectives of the survey;

(c) There were differences between the questionnaire in the database and the one on paper provided to the institutions and, in the conversion from one system to the other, some of the information sent by the institutions has been lost;

(d) The survey is not specifically geared to cross-sectoral and cross-cultural institutions, nor is it geared towards institutions working with traditional knowledge;

(e) The questionnaire approach is rather impersonal: on-site visits would help explain the objectives of the survey and provide guidance in filling the questionnaire, and in general help achievement of the goal of an active network;

(f) Those institutions with unreliable or no internet or web connections and those less familiar with the internet, e-mail, web and database programmes faced difficulties (sometimes substantial) in responding to the survey. Unfortunately this applies particularly to participants from civil society or to entire countries, which do not have access to modern communication technologies;

(g) Difficulties were sometimes encountered in soliciting responses. Surveys are normally given a low priority, even if the topics they address are pertinent to the respondent institutions and individuals;

(h) Because of funding constraints, only the six official United Nations languages were used for the survey. This may have hampered reception of the survey questionnaires in countries where United Nations languages are not so extensively used and consequently further lowered the response rate. UNSO/UNDP, however, managed to have the questionnaire translated into two additional languages: Mongolian and Portuguese. This had an extremely good impact on the response rate;

(i) The survey did not identify sufficient tangible benefits for the institutions surveyed, its specific purposes or uses for its results;

(j) The choice of institutions (see, in particular, articles 16-19 of the Convention), based on their relevance to the implementation of the Convention, is probably too broad;

(k) The contacted institutions might have felt inclined not to respond to a questionnaire sent by mail;

(l) Many of these institutions were not necessarily involved in their country's NAP elaboration process, rendering it difficult for them to evaluate their interest in participating in the survey and to identify the benefits they might expect from their participation in the CST/CCD network.

D. How can the usefulness of the survey be improved in practical terms?

(27) Consortium members suggested, *inter alia*, the following measures with a view to improving the survey:

(a) Decentralize access and feedback by bodies cooperating under a common umbrella. Accordingly, some more sophisticated operational arrangements are recommended for the mid-term and long-term success of the survey;

(b) Support institutions which presently lack the technical know-how to enter data in the database;

(c) Increase cooperation with the national focal points;

(d) Set up subregional or regional databases, like the Asian regional thematic networks on desertification monitoring and assessment;

(e) Fine-tune the questionnaire for the phase 2 in-depth surveys;

(f) Send a sample draft of the questionnaire to those who have not responded;

(g) Encourage respondents to view the web site or send institutions a print-out of their web entry so that they can update it;

(h) Design (in future phases of the survey) web interfaces in other languages, such as French and Spanish. Currently, the web interface (i.e., the online data entry forms) exists only in English. The data, however, can be entered in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, or other western European languages. Translation of any of the questionnaires entered in multiple languages is unlikely to be feasible or cost-effective. Consideration should be given to translating the web interface into as many languages as possible, so as to encourage data entry;

(i) Show that there is a permanent effort under way to keep in touch with users. Users must perceive that they have been "identified", that someone is aware of their existence. This may be accomplished only by contacting each one of the registered users through direct communication, perhaps by using a specific mailing list, or by adding them to existing mailing lists;

(j) Develop friendly mechanisms to access, to cross-reference and to download information contained in the database;

(k) Contact the respondents as soon as possible to retrieve more relevant information;

(l) Recruit national consultants to carry out the survey in countries with low response rates.

E. How can the benefits of the survey be enhancing for users of the database, individuals and, in particular, non-governmental and community-based organizations?

(28) Members suggested, *inter alia*, the following measures as means of enhancing the benefits of the survey:

(a) Prepare and distribute a sample written report;

(b) Prepare a user-friendly manual and distribute it widely;

(c) Improve the HTML table that will include all the responses to questions 2.7 and 3.4 when institutions have provided multiple answers to these questions;

(d) Create mirror sites in Africa, Asia and Europe for more stable web access (this works fine for those who can already use the WWW);

(e) Improve the search engine, including with the use of pop-up menus, for example with keywords, geographical regions, etc. True Boolean search capabilities would be an asset;

(f) Disseminate information on the existence of this inventory.

IV. Maintaining the database

A. How often should the database be updated?

(29) Most consortium members suggested that updating of the database should be carried out once a year. Some were of the opinion that, using the capabilities of the web, it could be an ongoing process, while many others saw the necessity for a timed update, in view of the current limits in web accessibility.

B. Who should do it? The individual institutions themselves or someone assigned to do it and, if so, who?

(30) A wide range of possibilities was suggested, as follows:

(a) The individual institutions, in liaison with a central focal point that had a part-time paid staff-member for that purpose. There should be a web master to overview, or to perform, the practical part of the job in the database;

(b) One institution per region should be assigned to update the database;

(c) Consortium members - perhaps on a rotating basis - should have some responsibility for ensuring that the job is being performed satisfactorily for the users;

(d) Institutions with web access should be strongly encouraged to do their own updating as relevant. Someone should be assigned to remind them when their web sites are due to be updated;

(e) The Convention secretariat;

(f) A bidding process should be launched, to assign management to a private concern;

(31) In addition, a number of intermediate arrangements were suggested, including options to split the management among regions.

C. What role should individual institutions play in updating the database?

(32) Generally, all agencies can envisage playing a role in updating. The level of involvement will, however, depend on the availability of resources, as updating activities can be very time-consuming.

(33) The University of Arizona, as lead database designer for phase 1, is very experienced in the design and maintenance of this database and it has indicated its availability and willingness to continue to house and develop the database, and to take on a similar role in future phases of this project, if so requested.

(34) If it were decided to move the entire database to a different location, for example to the Convention secretariat in Bonn, where it could be housed on the official Convention web site and maintained by the secretariat, the University of Arizona would ensure its smooth transition.

(35) To give an example of the possible roles of other Consortium members, two institutions have been selected at random and are summarized as follows:

(a) ISRIC indicated that it could act as a focal point or clearing house for a geographical region to be defined, to assist institutions which do not have direct internet access to the database in entering data and, even more important, to assist in extracting and using the data;

(b) OSS is prepared to update the African part of the database regularly and create a networks on themes (selected for phase 2) together with appropriate African subregional organizations and interested international organizations working in Africa within the Convention framework.

(36) All consortium members have supplied UNEP with detailed descriptions of how they envisage their involvement in efforts to update the database, in a manner consistent with their individual profile.

Annex IV

PROVISIONAL MODUS OPERANDI FOR PHASE 2

Background

Following a discussion, the consortium concluded that specific common themes had encouraged interested institutions and organizations to form formal or informal networks among themselves. Those networks survived and flourished as long as there was some benefit to their members from their participation. For that reason, some networks established with all good political intentions, with formal structures and heavy institutional burdens, but without a genuine user spirit to keep it active, had either collapsed or were become non-operational. As soon as the interest and funds of the founders of a network were diverted elsewhere, the structures remained but action died.

As an example, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) had established eight different regional networks, such as those on soils and fertilizers (SOFERNET), and on bodiversity. They were all linked under the umbrella of African environmental concerns. SOFERNET action had become dormant since UNEP financial support had stopped few years previously. The AMCEN biodiversity network, after some time in a dormant stage, had sparked into new life when additional UNEP support had recently been allocated for a regional discussion on a new theme: the biosafety protocol. Similarly, a number of other networks had been established. with a life span limited to the vitality of their respective themes1/. There were also special networks like that formed by non-governmental organizations: RIOD and its members' networks.

Members' subscription to the thematic interest of a network and a dedicated network caretaker member remain as the two cornerstones of a network.

1/ Some of these had been initiated as projects supported by international organizations, e.g.. the Forest Action Network, the Forest Trees and People Programme amd ILEIA.

Some may either have ceased or continue to exist as structures only after the termination of the project itself, e.g. the AMCEN networks mentioned above.

Some are newly started or still in the making, like the GEF projects: People, Land management and Environmental Change (PLEC) and Desert Margins Programme(DMP), or the network for promoting sustainable agricultural farming systems (in the context of the African regional action plan of the Convention to Combat Desertification..

Some regional programmes contain established networks of participant institutions, like the GCTE network on soil erosion, or the FAO network on Mediterranean forestry; the networks of WMO, bilateral donors or regional bodies, e.g., Agrhymet, Locust Control, FEWS, Earthwatch, GTOS, WOCAT, MEDALUS, RICAMARE and MEDIAS.

Some programmes show promise for the etsablishment of an appropriate network, e.g. those on alternative technologies for fresh water augmentation in Africa; or the expert groups of, for examples, the International Association for Scientific Hydrology (IAHS), or agricultural research networks (e.g., those of CGIAR) on saline soils; animal power, and the African Highlands Initiative .

Provisional strategy

- The consortium, therefore, proposes that the present status of action of existing thematic networks be examined as a first step of phase 2. This would build on the phase 1 survey questionnaire. (It requested each addressee institution to provide information on the formal networks to which they belong as part of their desertification related activities).

- In phase 2, design of two in-depth survey instruments would be needed. It is envisaged that one questionnaire will be targeted specifically at non-governmental and community-based organization networks, and the other will be targeted at all other surveyed networks within the selected phase 2 priority region. Furthermore, the phase 2 questionnaire design process aims to ensure that the questionnaires are developed in a format compatible with the data entry requirements of the online, web-based database. This strictly technical role would be considered as part of the basic database maintenance services.

- The phase 1 global database forms the first entry point for information for phase 2. The phase 1 is still evolving entries to the database are still being received and database maintenance and quality control activities are currently being conducted first, to identify and eliminate any deficient or duplicate records within the database; second, further to refine region and country "look-up" tables to allow searching by country and region in English, French and Spanish; and, third, to identify and solve possible problems in displaying database records following a search, such as the incorrect formatting of records.

- Its development should therefore be allowed to continue over phase 2, by present organizations. Developing the expanded database structure for phase 2 necessarily goes hand-in-hand with the development of phase 2 surveys. Thus, parallel with the development of the phase 2 surveys, there would be a need for the following measures:

  (a) To develop web-based forms for entry of these additional data;

  (b) To build on the database structure already established during phase 1, in order to accommodate the data to be gathered during phase 2; and

  (c) To develop new web interface pages as necessary to provide access to the expanded database contents.

- In order to enhance access to information contained within the database, there is a need to develop the database search engine to allow true Boolean and keyword searching. Furthermore, during phase 2, an auxiliary, parallel, searchable database is proposed that will list official names, contact persons and addresses for all those institutions contacted during phase 1 but

that have not yet (for whatever reason) sent a response. This parallel database would be accessible from the existing web site and will provide at least basic contact information for these non-responding institutions which, nonetheless, could potentially be valuable actors in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

- After phase 2, the database should be housed with an appropriate "caretaker" organization with an interest and skills to maintain the interactivity of the database and to keep it up-to-date. The interactivity, through internet and e-mail discussion groups between people and institutions and parties of similar functions and interests, is seen as a great potential of this database to be realized in the next five years as information technology penetrates deeper in all continents

- The consortium realizes that the questionnaire methodology employed in the preliminary phase 1 would not yield an acceptable response rate if it were used as the only tool for an in-depth survey. It therefore proposes that the phase 2 survey should be conducted as a detailed assistance project between the surveyors and national counterparts at the country level.

- The consortium, in its expert opinion, further suggests that the phase 2 survey should be undertaken in the region, which covers both Africa and the Mediterranean. The latter forms a natural bridge between north Africa, western Asia and southern Europe, both geographically and culturally.

- As the next step, modules of selected thematic networks would be surveyed, on an in-depth, institution-by-institution basis, in the region. These in-depth surveys focus on various thematic networks within the target regions that are already working on desertification-related issues. This approach is consistent with the stated mandate of the Convention to Combat Desertification to follow a bottom-up, collaborative, cost-effective approach to creating a "meta-network" of networks and institutions already working on desertification and thus well-suited to be mobilized for implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

- A consortium of core agencies with a continuing mandate and interest in the region (Africa plus Mediterranean) would be called on to participate in the formulation of an action plan for each module and for discussions with national focal points about their actual and perceived needs. The consortium proposes the overlapping regions of Africa and the Mediterranean for in-depth surveying activities, to be carried out by means of collaborative partnerships between consortium members and their national counterparts.

- An in-depth survey of one or several thematic networks can then be undertaken simultaneously or in succession and along with the further development of the phase 1 global database.

- The present phase 1 database already contains information on various existing regional networks. As one of the phase 1 survey questions, responding institutions were asked to identify formal networks to which they belong and which are working on some aspect of desertification. Thus, during phase 1, in addition to assembling a core database of information on individual institutions, the groundwork for collecting in-depth information about these thematic networks was also laid. By surveying selected such networks within the target region, phase 2 will thus build on, expand and enrich the body of information already collected during phase 1.

- This information may need to be catalogued with standard descriptions under pre-decided headings such as: (a) objectives; (b) main activities; (c) organizations, (d) contacts and sources. In addition to those of AMCEN above, there are several examples of themes and thematic networks presently at different stages of operation and levels of action and which are relevant to implementation of the Convention, which could be surveyed on an in-depth basis in phase 2.

- In phase 2, specific research will have to be conducted into one group of networks on traditional knowledge on various desertification control issues, as specified by decision 17/COP.2.

- It is envisaged that the Convention's national focal points would form the first contact base for action in each country. In phase 1, communication deficiencies were encountered in Web and e-mail accessibility, especially with the African institutions. Therefore, as a separate module, the consortium proposes that, in order to improve the interactivity of the region, the most "web-deficient" national partner institutes of the region should be assisted with the provision of appropriate technical means, like computer hardware and software and related training.

- The consortium also envisages that, over the course of two years, multiple networks of different themes in the selected region can be surveyed in-depth, subject to availability and the timely release of funds.

- This approach to phase 2 will also pave the way for phase 3 of the project. The in-depth questionnaires, methodologies, and expanded database structure developed during phase 2 will provide a model, or prototype, to be used during phase 3, with a view to extending this in-depth survey throughout the world.